BOOK SUMMARY

The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God

Jonathan Edwards



BE UNITED IN CHRIST

BE UNITED IN CHRIST BOOK SUMMARY

Book Summary: The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God
Copyright © 2017 Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry

This material is based on the public domain version of The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God published in The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 2 (London: William Ball, 1839). The public domain version is hosted by the HathiTrust Digital Library. This version has been altered in places to make it more understandable for modern readers.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB). Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. www.Lockman.org

This book summary was developed and distributed by the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry for use in your personal life and ministry. It is our desire for you to use, reproduce, and distribute this material free of charge. Our only restrictions are that you do not alter the book summary content in any way, that you do not sell the book summary content for profit, and that you attribute the work to the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry.

Please visit our BeUnitedinChrist.com for other Bible-based resources.

Be United in Christ

Book Summary

The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God

Jonathan Edwards

beunitedinchrist.com

Author

Jonathan Edwards was born October 5, 1703, in East Windsor, Connecticut. His father pastored a church for 63 years. His mother, Esther, was the daughter of a prominent New England minister. Jonathan was the fifth of eleven children and the only boy. In July of 1727, he married Sarah Pierpont. They had eleven children and were married for 31 years, until his death.

Edwards entered Yale College at thirteen, earning a bachelor's degree in 1720 and a master's degree in 1723. He was brought to faith in Christ during his years at Yale and later recalled the moment:

> The first instance, that I remember, of that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things, that I have lived much in since, was on reading those words, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen" (1 Timothy 1:17). As I read the words, there came into my soul and was, as it were, diffused through it a sense of the glory of the Divine Being—a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before. Never had any words of Scripture seemed to me as these words did. I thought to myself: how excellent a Being that was and how happy I should be if I might enjoy that God and be caught up to Him in Heaven and be, as it were, swallowed up in Him forever![1]

In 1726, Edwards assumed a pastoral position under his grandfather Solomon Stoddard in Northampton, Massachusetts. Three years later he succeeded Stoddard as senior pastor. After being dismissed from his Northampton post in 1750, Edwards moved to the frontier town of Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Over the next eight years he ministered to the settlers and the Native American peoples who lived nearby. He penned a number of important theological works: *Freedom of the Will*, *The End for Which God Created the World*, *The Nature of True Virtue*, and *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended*.

Many consider Edwards to be the greatest theologian in American history. His preaching was powerful. His writing was prolific. The manner of his life was a testimony to the grace of God and the meekness of his faith. Sadly, his death was abrupt. After being installed as president of the College of New Jersey on February 16, 1758, later renamed Princeton University, Edwards contracted smallpox from an inoculation and died on March 22, 1758. In his parting moments Edwards said, "Now where is Jesus of Nazareth, my true and never-failing Friend?" Then after a silence he voiced his final words, "Trust in God, and you need not fear."[2]

---

[1] Sereno E. Dwight, "Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards," in vol. 1 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman (London: William Ball, 1839), lv.

[2] Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1987), 441.

Overview

Distinguishing Marks was first published in Boston in November of 1741. The full title was: *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God, Applied to That Uncommon Operation That Has Lately Appeared on the Minds of Many of the People of This Land: With a Particular Consideration of the Extraordinary Circumstances with Which This Work Is Attended*. Edwards originally delivered a shorter form as a commencement address to Yale College on September 10, 1741.

In the original address, Edwards explained and defended the revival sweeping across New England. He had played a significant role in the Great Awakening, a series of revivals that began in 1734 and spread through the colonies. He was both a pastor and historian during this time, documenting the revivals in *A Narrative of Surprising Conversions and An Account of the Revival of Religion in Northampton 1740–1742*. Edwards also preached a series of sermons promoting the revivals, published as *A History of the Work of Redemption*. His most famous revival-style sermon is "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." As controversy rose regarding the revivals, Edwards became an apologist and interpreter of them through his writings: *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival*, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, and *Religious Affections*.

Yet the Yale leadership was skeptical of the revival due to some preachers who were traveling through the country, preaching passionate sermons and openly condemning local ministers. When Jonathan Edwards stood before Yale faculty and students to deliver the speech, he faced two sides of a heated debate.

Critics of the revival argued that the abuses and excesses being witnessed were offensive enough to discount the godliness of the events. Strong supporters of the revival accepted the whole affair as a work of God. Both sides looked to Edwards to support their position and quell the opposition. He was the most respected voice on the issue. Edwards aimed "to show what are the true, certain, and distinguishing evidences of a work of the Spirit of God by which we may safely proceed in judging of any operation we find in ourselves or see in others." The Biblical framework for his conclusions came from 1 John 4:1–6.

Nine Negative Marks of the Spirit's Work

Opponents of the revivals cited reasons to doubt their validity: the fiery, often frightful preaching; invoking the terrors of Hell with vivid, imaginative imagery; the rash condemnation of local ministers; the sudden increase of traveling teachers; the unusual behavior of people attending revival meetings; bodily effects such as convulsions, fainting, and vocal outcries; the intense devotion of common people to spiritual things. Critics argued these could not be the work of the Holy Spirit.

In response Edwards argues that the following nine "negative signs are not signs by which we are to judge a work—and especially are not evidences that a work is not from the Spirit of God." In other words, the presence of these signs neither confirms nor denies their origin from the Holy Spirit.

1. Unusual Circumstances

According to Edwards, "nothing can be certainly concluded if a work is carried on in a very unusual and extraordinary way, provided the variety or difference be comprehended within the limits of Scripture." At various times in human history, the Holy Spirit has operated in a peculiar way to us. The devil has as well. The mere strangeness of the occurrence does not reveal the source one way or another. "The Holy Spirit is sovereign in His operation, and we know that He uses a great variety, and we cannot tell how great a variety He may use within the scope of the rules He Himself has fixed. We should not limit God where He has not limited Himself."

When the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles, they were given the ability to speak in various languages (Acts 2:4). The crowd thought they were drunk. Peter stood up to explain, and the Spirit provided a new aptness and boldness in his preaching (Acts 2:14–39). Never has there been another Pentecost, but the Spirit has on occasion used unusual signs in bringing the gospel to people. "Therefore it is not reasonable to determine that a work is not from God's Holy Spirit because of the extraordinary degree in which the minds of people are influenced."

2. Physical Effects

Physical effects on the body may arise from any number of causes. Of themselves they are not always sufficient to determine the source. "A work is not to be judged by any effects on the bodies of men, such as tears, trembling, groans, loud outcries, agonies of body, or the failing of bodily strength." The reason for his conclusion was simple: "because there is no rule of Scripture given to us to judge spirits that does either expressly or indirectly exclude such effects on the body, nor does reason exclude them."

When a human being encounters terrible danger, his body reacts. How much more, Edwards wonders, should he who perceives his doom, who senses the wrath of God nearby, who sees his soul hanging by a thread over the fires of eternal torment, experience real effects on his body! The Philippian jailer "fell down trembling before Paul and Silas" (Acts 16:29). The writers of the Psalms often referenced the effects of their sin and their salvation upon their bodies (see Psalm 32). "Indeed all such objections from effects on the body seem to be exceedingly insignificant." It seems far more reasonable to Edwards that "the root and course of things is to be looked at, and the nature of the operations and affections are to be inquired into and examined by the rule of God's Word."

3. Intense Affections for God

Consider those who hear a week of powerful preaching and are brought to a new awareness of their sin, a new devotion to God, or perhaps even conversion to faith in Jesus Christ. They return to their everyday lives with special fervor and commitment. They read Scripture intently. They think about Christ constantly. They speak of Him with new zeal. Often these passions fade in the months to follow, but sometimes they do not. Either way they should not be dismissed as mere invention. "It is no argument that a work on the minds of people is not the work of the Spirit of God, in that it causes a great stir about religion."

Some affections about religion are not the work of the Holy Spirit. The Pharisees loved to parade their religion before men (Matthew 23:1–7). They had "zeal for God, but not according to knowledge" (Romans 10:2). They loved the praise of men. It cannot be fairly said, however, that all people with zeal for God are like them. "Surely, it is no argument that the minds of people are not under the influence of God's Spirit, in that they are very much moved. For indeed, spiritual and eternal things are so great and of such everlasting concern that there is a great absurdity in men being only moderately moved and affected by them." It would be far stranger for us to understand the great mystery of Christ and remain unmoved.

4. Use of the Imagination

Scripture uses words to evoke images and arouse affections. Though we were not among the people of Israel at Mount Sinai, we can imagine the lightning and thunder (Exodus 19:16). The words of the Bible tell the story, and imagination helps us envision it. The imagination, when submitted to faith, moves us toward the reality in which the Lord dwells. Therefore, "it is no argument that a work on the minds of people is not the work of the Spirit of God, in that many who are the subjects of it have great impressions made on their imaginations."

People can get carried away with false visions and vain ecstasy. They can be deceived and they can deceive others. For this reason John wrote, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Scripture does not say to reject every spirit. "It is no argument that a work is not of the Spirit of God, in that some who are the subjects of it have been in a kind of ecstasy—wherein they have been carried beyond themselves and have had their minds transported into a train of strong and pleasing imaginations—and a kind of vision as though they were carried up even to Heaven and saw glorious sights there." While visions may be a work of Satan, they may instead be a work of God. Marked impressions upon the imagination should not be the standard for judgment.

5. Influential Examples

Souls were deeply stirred during the Great Awakening, not simply by the preaching of the Word but also by the examples of transformed lives. Opponents of the revivals made this a point of dismissal. Since so many people were following the example of others in their confessions and faith, how could it be genuine? Edwards argues, "it is no sign that a work is not from the Spirit of God, in that example is a great means of it." He references numerous passages of Scripture directing us to set good examples and follow good examples in faith and conduct (see Matthew 5:16; 2 Corinthians 8:1–7).

"And as it is a Scriptural way of carrying on God's work by example, so it is a reasonable way. It is no argument that men are not influenced by reason, in that they are influenced by example." Why else would Paul say, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1), unless there was something quite reasonable in his command? Affections stirred by the preaching of Scripture "may prove flashy and soon vanish … but the affections of some thus moved by example are abiding." God principally uses words to transform lives, but He also uses godly examples to transform lives.

6. Unwise Conduct

Foolishness and immaturity in a Christian community does not invalidate the work of the Spirit among them. "It is no sign that a work is not from the Spirit of God, in that many who seem to be the subjects of it are guilty of great imprudence and irregularities in their conduct.… The end for which God pours out His Spirit is to make men holy and not to make them manipulators." The Corinthians were a case in point. They were richly blessed with the Spirit of God but were still prone to immaturity. Their pride abounded; they scandalized the Lord's Supper. And yet, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, which made their foolish conduct all the more shameful.

Edwards goes a step further. "It is no evidence that a work is not of God if many who are either the subjects or the instruments of it are guilty of being too eager to judge others as unconverted." Edwards disagrees with those who accused local ministers of being unconverted simply because their preaching and congregations did not show the zeal of a revivalist meeting. At the same time, Edwards argues, the rash judgments of some did not negate the work of the Spirit in the revival itself.

7. Theological Error

Sometimes a legitimate work of God in the hearts of His people can be accompanied by falsehood, error, and other products of the devil. These do not disqualify the acts of God. "Nor are many errors in judgment and some delusions of Satan that have intermixed with the work any argument that the work in general is not of the Spirit of God." A new saint is not yet a perfected saint. The Holy Spirit does not cast out all sin at once. A Christian can believe wrong things and even teach wrong things, though he should be corrected over time. Apparently our Lord has been pleased to allow an intermingling of the corruptible with incorruptible, "where grace dwells with so much corruption, and the new man and the old man exist together in the same person, and the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil remain for a while together in the same heart."

8. Counterfeit Believers

Judas Iscariot followed Jesus for over three years, only to fall away and betray Him (John 18:2–5). Did this disqualify the ministry of Christ? Alexander was a companion of Paul, and yet he did Paul much harm (2 Timothy 4:14). Was the ministry of the apostle without the Spirit? "If some … fall away into gross errors or scandalous practices, then it is no argument that the work in general is not the work of the Spirit of God." Otherwise, there could be nothing true or enduring in the work of Jesus and His apostles. "That there are some counterfeits is no argument that nothing is true. Such things are always expected in a time of reformation."

History tells the story. "It is particularly observable, that in times of great pouring out of the Spirit to revive religion in the world, a number of those who for a while seemed to partake in it have fallen off into irregular and extravagant errors and gross enthusiasm, boasting of high degrees of spirituality and perfection, censuring and condemning others as fleshly." The fact that the devil sows his tares among the Spirit's wheat (Matthew 13:36–43) does not discount the Spirit's work.

9. Terrifying Preaching

Heated and lively preaching marked the revivals. The weight of God's Law was laid upon the souls of the hearers. Torments of Hell were vividly portrayed. The need for Christ could not have been more plainly proclaimed. Listeners were affected. They moaned, trembled, and cried out to God for mercy. Critics considered such preaching to be manipulative.

While fiery preaching can sometimes be a merely human work, Edwards argues that it is not reasonable for revivals to be dismissed on these grounds. "It is no argument that a work is not from the Spirit of God, in that it seems to be promoted by ministers who insist on the terrors of God's holy Law with a great deal of pity and earnestness." Urgent preaching fit the seriousness of the times. If Hell is a terrible place, "why is it not proper for those who have the care of souls to take great pains to make men aware of it? Why should they not be told as much of the truth as can be?" He went on to say, "Some say it is an unreasonable thing to frighten people to Heaven, but I think it is a reasonable thing to try to frighten people away from Hell. They stand upon its brink, are just ready to fall into it, and are senseless of their danger. Is it not a reasonable thing to frighten a person out of a house on fire?"

Five Positive Marks of the Spirit's Work

After describing nine works that do not necessarily show whether or not a work is of the Spirit, Edwards proposes "the sure distinguishing Scripture evidences and marks of a work of the Spirit of God by which we may judge any work we find in ourselves or see among people without danger of being misled."

1. Jesus Is Honored

If the Spirit's work in the hearts and lives of people brings about greater reverence for Jesus Christ, then we can rightly say that it is from the Spirit of God. A firmer grasp of His virgin birth and His identity as the Son of God, as well as the meaning of His death and resurrection, only comes by the Holy Spirit. The words of the apostle convey it plainly: "By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God" (1 John 4:2). Merely acknowledging His existence is not enough. Thinking Jesus was a good man is not what John means. The word "confesses" refers to sincere faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who came in the flesh. Numerous verses attribute genuine confessions of Jesus as the Christ to the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3; Philippians 2:9–11; 1 John 4:15; 5:1).

> So that if the spirit that is at work among a people to convince them of Christ and lead them to Him—to confirm their minds in the belief of the history of Christ as He appeared in the flesh—and that He is the Son of God and was sent by God to save sinners; that He is the only Savior and that they stand in great need of Him; and if He seems to create in them higher and more honorable thoughts of Him than they used to have and to incline their affections more to Him; then it is a sure sign that it is the true and right Spirit.

On the other hand, "every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world" (1 John 4:3). Denying the true nature of Jesus as fully God and fully man is the very essence of the Antichrist. The devil loathes the story of Christ and His redeeming work. "He [the devil] never would go about to produce in men more honorable thoughts of Him [God] and lay greater weight on His instructions and commands."

2. Satan's Kingdom Is Opposed

The Spirit of God is at work whenever and wherever people love the things of the world less and the glories of Heaven more. Loving the pleasures and praises of the world, however, marks the spirit of the world. The spirit of the world "speaks and savors the things of the world." The spirit of the world drives people to live for "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16).

However, the Spirit of God overcomes the lusts of the world in the hearts of God's children. "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them" (1 John 4:4–5). The Spirit of God compels people to "walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10). Edwards notes: "When the spirit that is at work operates against the interests of Satan's kingdom—which lies in encouraging and establishing sin and cherishing men's worldly lusts—this is a sure sign that it is a true and not a false spirit."

Perhaps, some might argue, Satan awakens the conscience of sinners in order to deceive them. Satan lessens their love for the world in order to make them proud and feel sheltered from God's wrath. Edwards finds no appeal in this claim. "If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?" (Matthew 12:26). The devil will not labor for his own demise.

"The man who has an awakened conscience is the least likely to be deceived of any man in the world. It is the drowsy, insensible, dull conscience that is most easily blinded." One who is alerted to the vileness of his sin, the weight of his guilt before God, and the terror of divine judgment will not be satisfied with a false sense of comfort. True sorrow over sin will not rest in anything less than a true Savior. Indeed, the Spirit of God, not Satan, shows a man the ugliness of worldly pleasures, his need for Christ, and the beauty of treasures in Heaven.

3. God's Word Is Highly Regarded

Increased delight in the Word of God does not arise from evil sources but from God. "The spirit that operates in such a manner, as to cause in men a greater regard for the Holy Scriptures, and establishes them more in their truth and religion, is certainly the Spirit of God." Edwards bases his conclusion upon 1 John 4:6: "We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us." The apostles were sent into the world bearing the very words of God. Only hearts filled with the Spirit of God can truly comprehend, believe, and delight in their teaching. A person may well agree with the words of Scripture on some intellectual level, but his commitment will fade and dissolve. Only the Holy Spirit can provoke a deep and lasting esteem for the words of Holy Scripture.

> The devil would never attempt to produce in people a high regard for the divine Word that God has given.… Would the Prince of Darkness, in order to promote his kingdom of darkness, lead men to the sun? The devil has always shown a spite and hatred toward that holy book, the Bible. He has done all in his power to extinguish that light and to draw men off from it. He knows it to be that light by which his kingdom of darkness is to be overthrown.… Every text is a dart to torment the old Serpent. He has felt the sting thousands of times. Therefore he is engaged against the Bible and hates every word in it. And we may be sure that he never will attempt to raise people's regard of it or affection to it.

4. God's Truth Is Revealed

Not only is affection for God's Word a mark of the Spirit but so also is an ability to distinguish between truth and error. Through His Spirit, "we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (1 John 4:6). A spirit that leads people away from error and into truth is the Spirit of God. If people who cherished sin have begun to feel disgust toward it, if people who used to speak lies now speak the truth, if people who cared nothing for sound doctrine begin to prize it, then we can safely suppose the Spirit of God is responsible for the change.

We once dwelled in darkness, but now we live in the light and love the light (Ephesians 5:8). "Whatever spirit removes our darkness and brings us to the light enlightens us. And by convincing us of the truth, this spirit does us a kindness. If I am brought to a display of the truth and am made sensible of things as they really are, my duty is immediately to thank God for it," for we have received grace from the Spirit of truth (John 14:17).

5. God and Others Are Loved

Only by the Holy Spirit can we truly love God and others (1 John 4:12–16). "If the spirit that is at work among a people operates as a spirit of love to God and man, it is a sure sign that it is the Spirit of God." Of the five marks, "this last mark which the apostle gives of the true Spirit he seems to speak of as the most important." If our love for God and others abounds, then surely this is a mark of the Holy Spirit.

Once more the Scripture distinguishes between two kinds of spirits in people when it says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:7–8). Love is a dividing line between God's Spirit and other spirits. "If we love one another, God abides in us" (1 John 4:12).

This is not a counterfeit love, "a kind of union and affection arising from self-love." We are considering real love "that arises from an understanding of the wonderful riches of the free grace and sovereignty of God's love to us in Christ Jesus, accompanied by a sense of our own utter unworthiness, as if we ourselves were the enemies and haters of God and Christ with a self-denial of all our own excellence and righteousness." This is the love that displays a true work of the Holy Spirit.

"The surest character of true divine supernatural love—distinguishing it from counterfeits that arise from a natural self-love—is that the Christian virtue of humility shines in it." Self-forgetfulness. Self-sacrifice. Self-renouncement. Lowering ourselves for the sake of others is the stuff of authentic love, which is the chief fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), the more excellent way (1 Corinthians 12:31), and the mark of the children of God (1 John 4:7–8).

Though the devil "transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14) and sends his false prophets into the world disguised as ministers of light, they prove incapable of truly reproducing the five true marks of a work of the Spirit of God. They may name Jesus Christ, but they will not help others worship Him. They may speak of heavenly things but show little joy in heavenly things. They may read the Bible and speak often of it, but they seem unable to lift the hearts of others toward it. They cannot separate genuine truth and error through Scripture. Their love will be mere words and shallow sentiments, for without the Spirit of God they simply cannot lower themselves for the sake of others.

Three Applications of the Spirit's Work

After considering the negative signs by which no one can judge the true origin of a work along with the five distinguishing marks of a work of the Spirit of God, Edwards offers three practical applications.

1. The Revivals Are a Work of the Spirit of God

Based upon "the rules of the Word of God" in 1 John 4 and the facts reported by those who had witnessed the revivals, Edwards concludes that God Himself is behind "the extraordinary influence that has lately appeared, causing an uncommon concern and focus on the things of religion." These signs of conversion were from people of various backgrounds, geographies, and ages. They came to be convinced of truths about Christ they had never believed before. As a firsthand witness, Jonathan Edwards "never yet knew anyone lastingly deprived of his reason." Their fears were in proportion to the truth of God's wrath upon them. Their joys were in proportion to their redemption. Overall, their repentance was genuine and their faith sincere. Those most affected expressed a "great sense of their exceeding wickedness, the multitude and seriousness of their actual sins." The light of Jesus Christ came, "filling their souls with love, admiration, joy, and humiliation, drawing forth their hearts after the excellent, lovely Redeemer, and longings to lie in the dust before Him, and that others might behold, embrace, and be delivered by Him. They had longings to live to His glory but were sensible that they could do nothing of themselves." The real changes of heart that followed could only be attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit.

2. The Revivals Should Be Promoted Rather Than Opposed

Since the revivals seemed to be a work of God's Spirit, they were to be supported, not scorned. When Christ comes from Heaven "in a remarkable and wonderful work of His Spirit, it is fitting for all His professed disciples to acknowledge Him and give Him honor." When the distinguishing marks of the Spirit of God are present in a great work on earth, Edwards argues, the people of God should delight in it rather than fight against it. Edwards recounts a story from the book of Acts. When members of the council arose to kill the apostles, the Pharisee Gamaliel reasoned with them: "And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God" (Acts 5:38–39).

3. Promoters of the Revivals Should Be Above Reproach

Edwards closes with a warning to the leaders and supporters of the revival: "Let me earnestly urge such to give diligent heed to themselves to avoid all errors and misconduct, and whatever may darken and obscure the work; and to give no opportunity to those who stand ready to condemn it." They are to carefully watch their conduct and their doctrine (1 Timothy 4:13–16; Titus 2:1–8). Participation in a glorious work of Christ does not diminish the importance of honor, prudence, and discretion. The need for self-control, maturity, and holiness is greater than ever. They have no business passing judgment "upon other professing Christians as hypocrites and ignorant of real religion." It is their duty to be diligent to love and preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1–3).

Appraisal

The need to discern truth and falsehood is as old as the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1–7). It will continue until Satan is thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10). There are many spirits, ideas, and operations in the world. The apostle John called the church to "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1). But how? Jonathan Edwards proposes an answer. Using 1 John 4:1–6 as a Biblical framework, he distinguishes a true work of the Spirit from a counterfeit. His guidance is godly. The value of his insights is enduring.

Distinguishing Marks addresses how both common and saving works of the Spirit can be differentiated and confirmed within oneself, in other individuals, and in broad movements within the church. Edwards tries to direct attention away from controversial external marks to the enduring evidence of spiritual work that cannot be humanly or diabolically fabricated. *Distinguishing Marks* creates a wise and sensible framework for testing spirits and discerning the work of the Holy Spirit in every age. Every generation will encounter various groups, ministries, or even movements claiming to be a work of the Spirit. We should not judge these based upon human reasoning and personal experience but with the rule of Scripture.

Connection to Be United in Christ

Edwards' *Distinguishing Marks* offers several applications for unity. First, we should be slow to judge a work among the people of God. We need time to appraise a matter carefully and Biblically. Second, we need to be gentle in how we share concerns with one another. When we disagree with other Christians we can always convey our differences with kindness. Unity depends upon it. Third, God's Word should be our guide, not our personal preferences and discomforts. We should not create divisions among one another because of external differences. Nor should we embrace and unite with one another if we disagree in the vital matters of doctrine and faith. Our unity is based upon Christ and His Word. Fourth, our focus should be upon the exaltation of Jesus Christ, the truth of God's Word, and love for others. These are the marks of the Spirit's work that allow us all to Be United in Christ.

Key Quotations

"Therefore it is not reasonable to determine that a work is not from God's Holy Spirit because of the extraordinary degree in which the minds of people are influenced."
"A work is not to be judged by any effects on the bodies of men, such as tears, trembling, groans, loud outcries, agonies of body, or the failing of bodily strength."
"It is no argument that a work on the minds of people is not the work of the Spirit of God, in that it causes a great stir about religion."
"It is no argument that a work on the minds of a people is not the work of the Spirit of God, in that many who are the subjects of it have great impressions made on their imaginations."
"It is no sign that a work is not from the Spirit of God, in that example is a great means of it."
"It is no sign that a work is not from the Spirit of God, in that many who seem to be the subjects of it are guilty of great imprudence and irregularities in their conduct."
"Nor are many errors in judgment and some delusions of Satan that have intermixed with the work any argument that the work in general is not of the Spirit of God."
"If some … fall away into gross errors or scandalous practices, then it is no argument that the work in general is not the work of the Spirit of God."
"It is no argument that a work is not from the Spirit of God, in that it seems to be promoted by ministers who insist on the terrors of God's holy Law with a great deal of pity and earnestness."
"So that if the spirit that is at work among a people to convince them of Christ and lead them to Him—to confirm their minds in the belief of the history of Christ as He appeared in the flesh—and that He is the Son of God and was sent by God to save sinners; that He is the only Savior and that they stand in great need of Him; and if He seems to create in them higher and more honorable thoughts of Him than they used to have and to incline their affections more to Him; then it is a sure sign that it is the true and right Spirit."
"When the spirit that is at work operates against the interests of Satan's kingdom—which lies in encouraging and establishing sin and cherishing men's worldly lusts—this is a sure sign that it is a true and not a false spirit."
"The spirit that operates in such a manner, as to cause in men a greater regard for the Holy Scriptures, and establishes them more in their truth and religion, is certainly the Spirit of God."
"If by observing the manner of the operation of the spirit that is at work among a people, we see that it operates as a spirit of truth, leading people to truth, convincing them of those things that are true, we may safely determine that it is a right and true spirit."
"If the spirit that is at work among a people operates as a spirit of love to God and man, it is a sure sign that it is the Spirit of God."

Key Bible Passages (NASB)

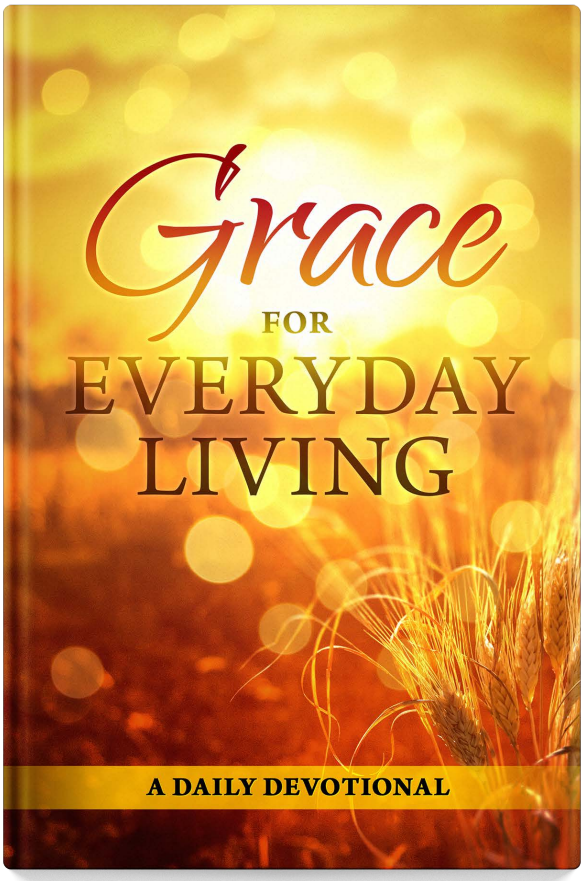
"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?" **(Matthew 7:15–16)**
"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you." **(John 14:16–17)**
"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come." **(John 16:13)**
"So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God." **(Acts 5:38–39)**
"Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God." **(1 Corinthians 4:5)**
"I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it." **(1 Corinthians 9:22–23)**
"Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed'; and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." **(1 Corinthians 12:3)**
"For even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds." **(2 Corinthians 11:14–15)**
"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light." **(Ephesians 5:6–8)**
"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." **(Colossians 2:8)**
"But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil." **(1 Thessalonians 5:21–22)**
"In all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us." **(Titus 2:7–8)**
"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the Antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world." **(1 John 4:1–3)**
"You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." **(1 John 4:4–6)**
"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments." **(1 John 5:1–2)**

JOIN THE BE UNITED IN CHRIST OUTREACH MINISTRY

WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH GOD'S GRACE?

God sees you. He loves you. And He wants you to experience a full and blessed life. In the 365-day devotional, *Grace for Everyday Living*, some of Christianity's most respected voices cast light on topics such as how to maintain a peaceful spirit, love others, and freely enjoy God's grace and mercy. Your life will be transformed as you discover the excitement of pleasing God and obeying His Word.

Our Premium Collection of books may be purchased from the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry at **www.beunitedinchrist.com.**



BE UNITED IN CHRIST

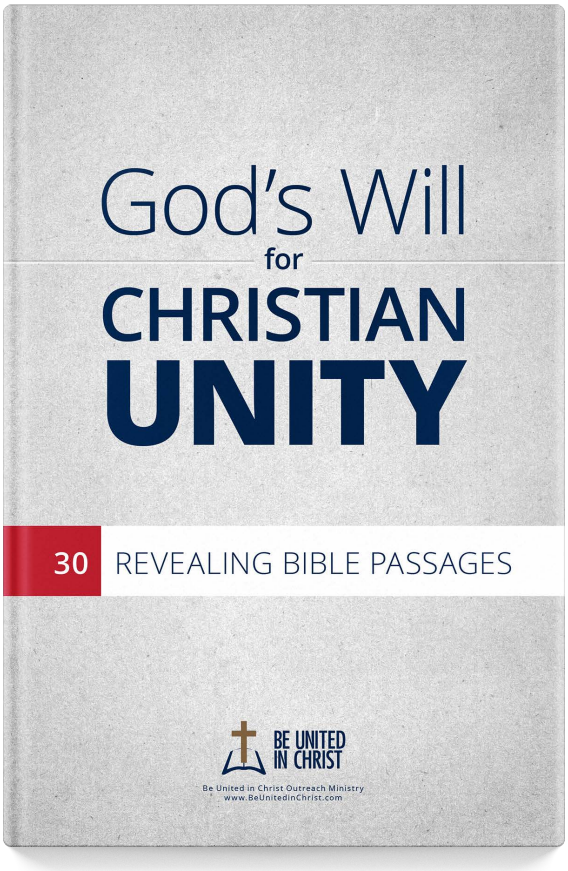
www.beunitedinchrist.com

JOIN THE BE UNITED IN CHRIST OUTREACH MINISTRY

BELIEVE IN GOD? READY TO DO HIS WILL?

The theme of Christian unity is found throughout the Bible. *God's Will for Christian Unity* clearly reveals, in thirty Bible passages, our Lord's passion and instruction on the meaning, importance, and manifestation of Christian unity. Understanding this collection of Bible passages will help you to know how you should think, feel, and act in relation to other believers in accordance with God's will.

Our Premium Collection of books may be purchased from the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry at **www.beunitedinchrist.com.**



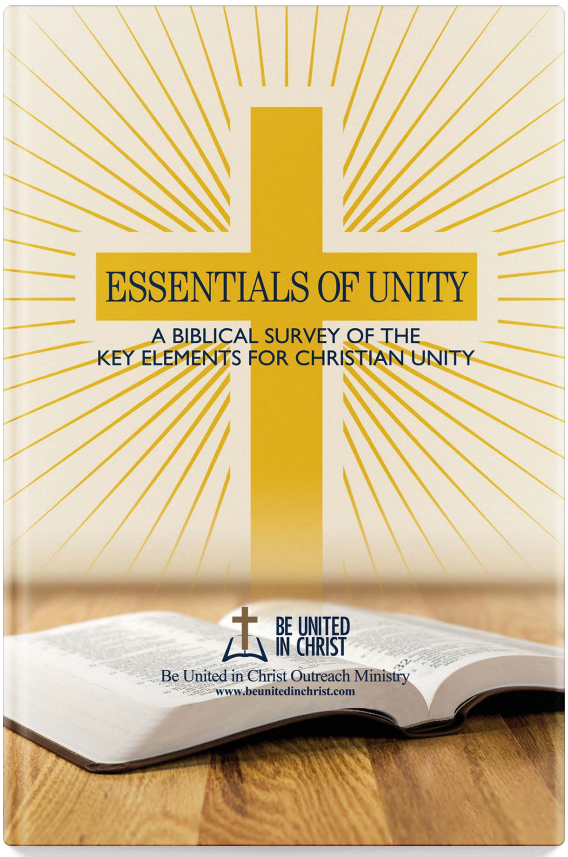
BE UNITED IN CHRIST

www.beunitedinchrist.com

UNITY IS ESSENTIAL FOR GOD'S PEOPLE.

The Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry has written Essentials of Unity from a great sense of conviction … to better understand God's will for the unity of His people, how He achieves it, and what He asks of each of us in preserving it. *Essentials of Unity* explains significant Biblical themes for understanding Christian unity and how these Biblical themes connect to one another in the storyline of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.

Our Premium Collection of books may be purchased from the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry at **www.beunitedinchrist.com.**



BE UNITED IN CHRIST

www.beunitedinchrist.com

JOIN THE BE UNITED IN CHRIST OUTREACH MINISTRY

FEEL THE PASSION OF CHRIST FOR UNITY.

In John 17:20–23, Jesus prayed for His disciples to be one … united with Him and each other. In His prayer, we hear the passion of Jesus Christ for the union of His people to God and to one another. *One: The Passion and Prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ* was written to help God's people understand the nature of this unity as well as how it is to be accomplished in the body of Christ.

Our Premium Collection of books may be purchased from the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry at **www.beunitedinchrist.com.**



BE UNITED IN CHRIST

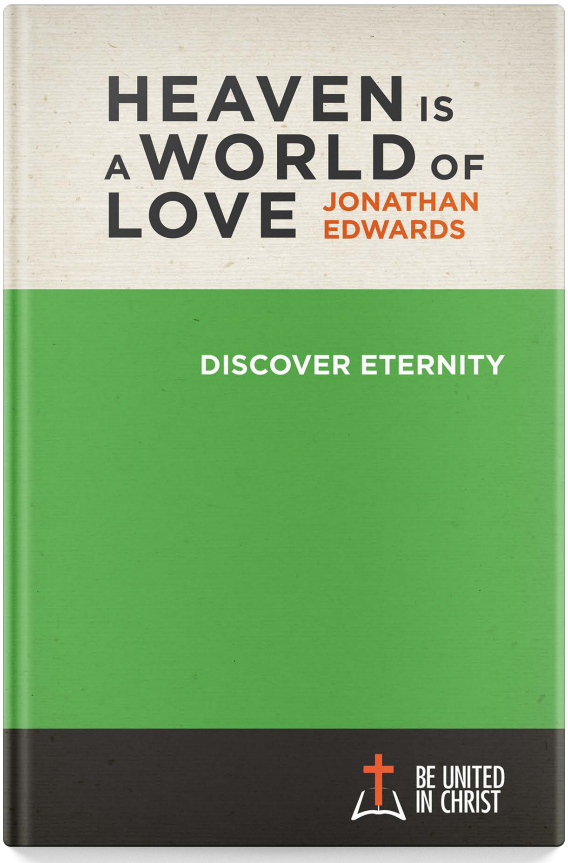
www.beunitedinchrist.com

JOIN THE BE UNITED IN CHRIST OUTREACH MINISTRY

HOW WILL YOU SPEND ETERNITY?

In the history of Christianity, no one has written as vividly on the subjects of Heaven and Hell as Jonathan Edwards. *Heaven Is a World of Love* combines Edwards' most powerful sermons and presents them in modern-day language. Be encouraged with the hope of Heaven, sobered by the horrors of Hell, and assured that you can spend eternity enjoying God's love.

Our Premium Collection of books may be purchased from the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry at **www.beunitedinchrist.com.**



BE UNITED IN CHRIST

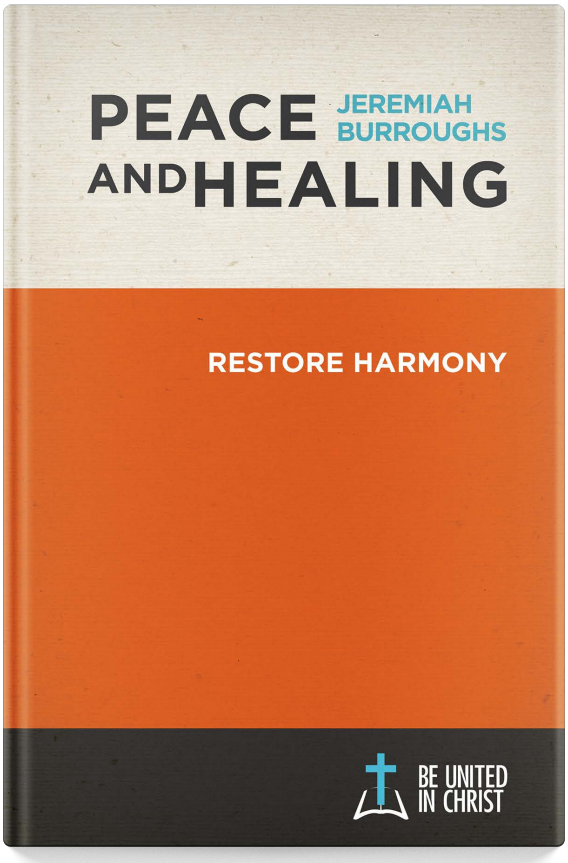
www.beunitedinchrist.com

JOIN THE BE UNITED IN CHRIST OUTREACH MINISTRY

BRING HARMONY TO YOUR CHRISTIAN FAMILY.

What if your church could be conflict-free? Drawn from the wisdom of respected Puritan preacher Jeremiah Burroughs, *Peace and Healing* reveals the sources and dangers of conflict within God's family and recommends God's solutions. Get to the root of disunity and bring love and harmony to the most important relationships in your life.

Our Premium Collection of books may be purchased from the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry at **www.beunitedinchrist.com.**



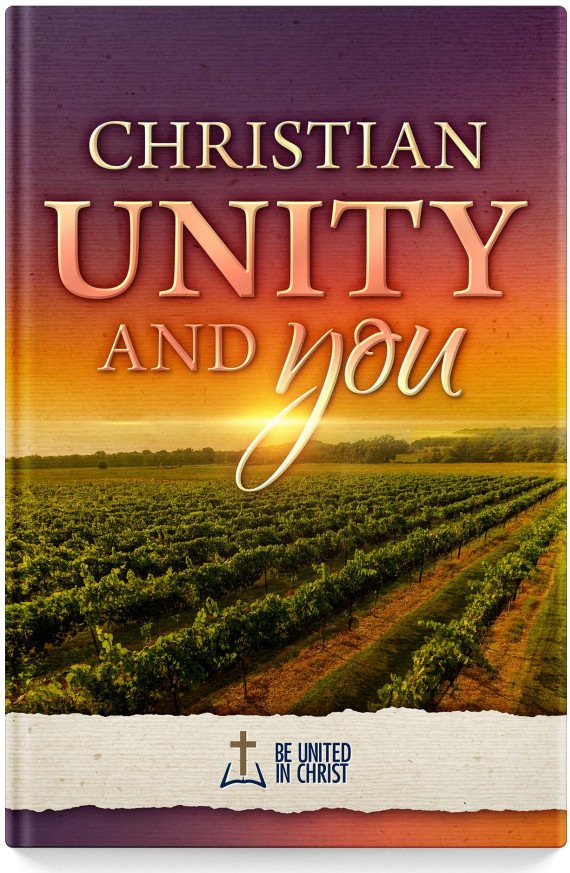
BE UNITED IN CHRIST

www.beunitedinchrist.com

YOU CAN LOVE LIKE JESUS.

Imagine how the world could be transformed if Christians loved each other the way Jesus asked them to. Jesus' life is the greatest example of love that the world has ever seen. He told His disciples to love one another as He loved them. When believers live in visible love and unity as Christ lived—unity based on Biblical truth—we will begin to experience a taste of what Heaven will be like.

Our Premium Collection of books may be purchased from the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry at **www.beunitedinchrist.com.**



BE UNITED IN CHRIST

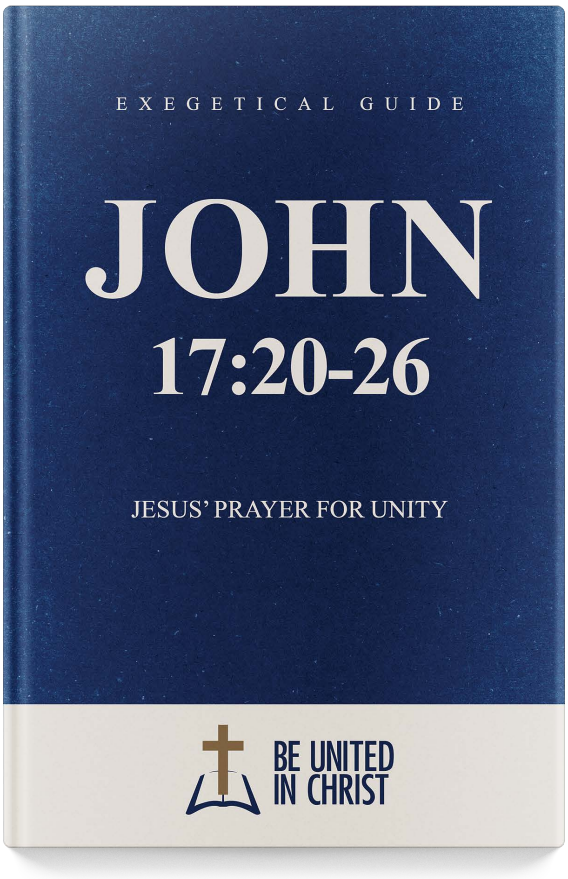
www.beunitedinchrist.com

JOIN THE BE UNITED IN CHRIST OUTREACH MINISTRY

LEARN WHAT JESUS PRAYED FOR YOU.

In the hours just before He was crucified, Jesus prayed for you. But what did He pray? And why does it matter? With the *John 17:20–26* Exegetical Guide, you will see through Jesus' eyes and be moved by what He prayed for you at this critical time. You will find where you belong. And your desire to draw closer to God and to other believers will grow as you read this inspiring guide.

Our Premium Collection of books may be purchased from the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry at **www.beunitedinchrist.com.**



BE UNITED IN CHRIST

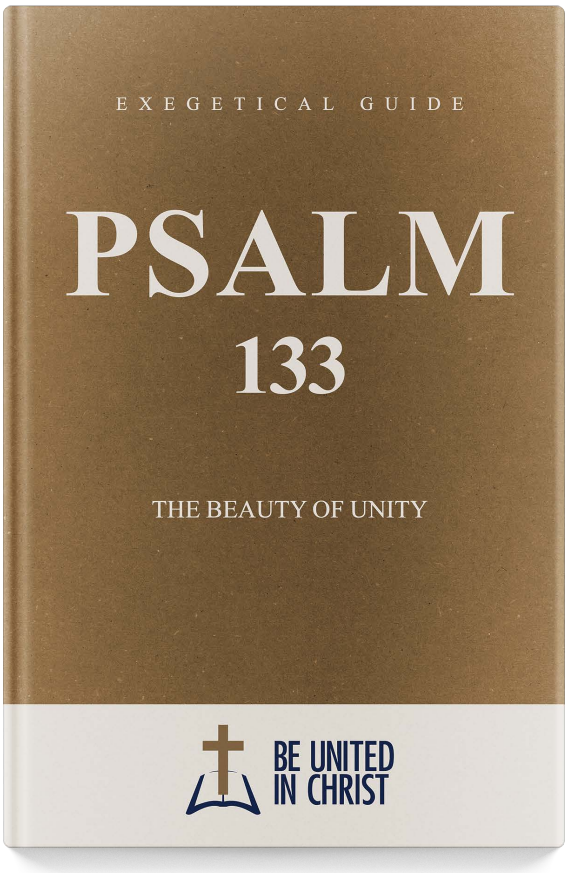
www.beunitedinchrist.com

JOIN THE BE UNITED IN CHRIST OUTREACH MINISTRY

DEVELOP A RICH CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY.

Blessing. Peace. Eternal life. How can you experience them for yourself? Explore *Psalm 133* and learn King David's song of the goodness and pleasantness of God's children living in harmony. You will discover that unity is not only God's desire but also His design to lead you into the satisfying life He desires for you to experience.

Our Premium Collection of books may be purchased from the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry at **www.beunitedinchrist.com.**



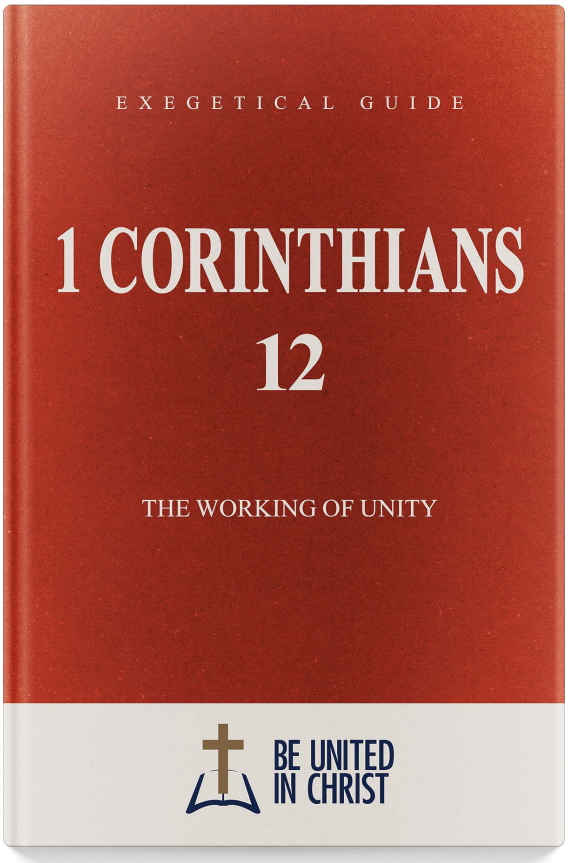
BE UNITED IN CHRIST

www.beunitedinchrist.com

UNCOVER YOUR PURPOSE IN GOD'S PLAN.

All of us want to belong, to feel connected, to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. For the Christian, these desires find their fulfillment in Christ and in the life He has designed for His church. The *1 Corinthians 12* Exegetical Guide will show you how God intends to fulfill your deep need to belong. You have a reserved position in His plan. You have a unique place, and you have a vital role.

Our Premium Collection of books may be purchased from the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry at **www.beunitedinchrist.com.**



BE UNITED IN CHRIST

www.beunitedinchrist.com

A THIRD GREAT LOVE COMMANDMENT.

Within every human heart is the desire to be loved and to show love. It is the mark of God on our lives—a God who embodies love, who IS love, according to the Bible. In His Word, God gives us three great commandments, rules for operating in love with Him, with others, and with our Christian family. These commands should provide the foundation for everything we say and do.

Our Premium Collection of books may be purchased from the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry at **www.beunitedinchrist.com.**



Basic Edition

Deluxe Edition

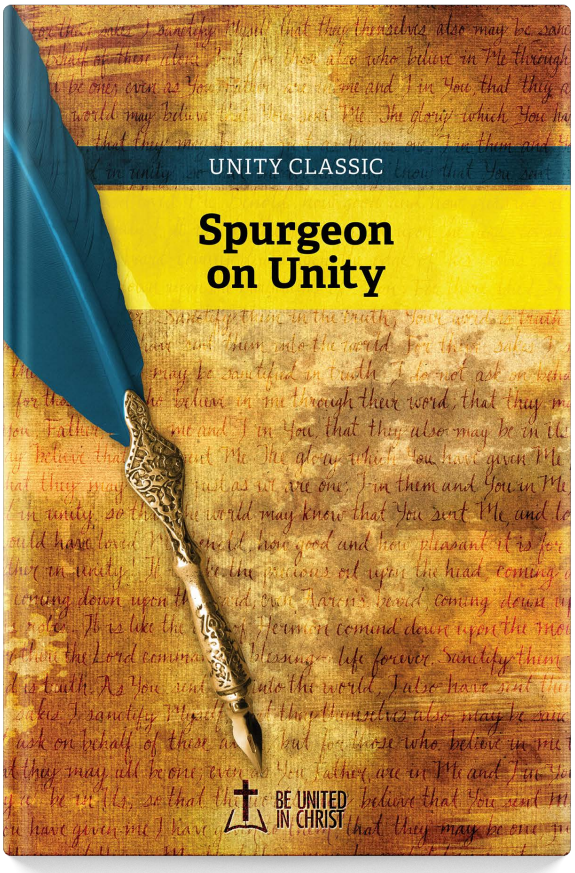
BE UNITED IN CHRIST

www.beunitedinchrist.com

ENJOY THE LIFE CHRIST INTENDS FOR YOU.

The most prominent preacher of the 19th century, Charles Spurgeon pastored the world's largest mega-church and spoke to millions. Considered one of the greatest preachers in church history, his messages are as inspiring today as when they were first preached. *Spurgeon On Unity* lets you slip into the pew of this "Prince of Preachers" as he applies God's Word to one of your greatest needs.

Our Premium Collection of books may be purchased from the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry at **www.beunitedinchrist.com.**



BE UNITED IN CHRIST

www.beunitedinchrist.com

JOIN THE BE UNITED IN CHRIST OUTREACH MINISTRY

We encourage you to reproduce, distribute, and share the materials of the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry and to unite with other brothers and sisters in Christ in the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry.

This book summary was developed and distributed by the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry for use in your personal life and ministry. It is our desire for you to use, reproduce, and distribute this material free of charge. Our only restrictions are that you do not alter the book summary content in any way, that you do not sell the book summary content for profit, and that you attribute the work to the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry.

The desire of the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry is to glorify our Lord by helping our brothers and sisters in Christ to have a better understanding of our Lord's passion and prayer for His people to "Be United in Christ."

Please join us in the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry as we await the glorious return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.



www.beunitedinchrist.com